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RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY 0711
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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0571
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 0649
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 0434
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DILI 000549

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [ASEC](#) [KJUS](#) [KPKO](#) [AU](#) [TT](#)
SUBJECT: EXPLAINING LAST WEEK'S UPSURGE OF VIOLENCE IN DILI

REF: DILI 534

DILI 00000549 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Elizabeth S. Wharton, Political/Economic Officer,
U.S. Embassy Dili, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b)

11. (C) Summary: While gang-related disturbances have become a regular feature of day-to-day life in recent months, last week's upsurge of violent confrontation was on a greater scale and with more lethal consequences. In addition, these disturbances were accompanied by what appeared to be a concerted campaign to discredit Australian forces. This combination has caused many observers to conclude that the violence was instigated for political ends, with the group around former Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri identified as the prime culprit. Whether or not this is the case, it is clear that Alkatiri's supporters are using the situation to drive their own agenda of painting themselves as victims of a conspiracy and reducing the role of Australian troops here. The incidents also point to Dili's continued vulnerability to large-scale disturbances. In addition, they underscore the two primary outstanding challenges to resolve East Timor's ongoing crisis: the need for a political solution to end the ongoing elite power struggle and the need for policing and judicial systems to function effectively enough to end the current pervasive sense of impunity. End summary.

Increased disturbances accompanied by anti-Australian campaign

12. (U) While gang-related disturbances have become a regular feature of day-to-day life in recent months, last week's upsurge of violent confrontation was on a greater scale and with more lethal consequences than seen since international forces took control of security in early June. This spike included: widespread fighting in the Comoro areas on October 22, effectively shutting down normal activity in this part of town and with one confirmed death; fighting between groups of up to 400 each on October 25 in and around the internally displaced person (IDP) camp adjacent to the airport, resulting in one

death and the airport's closure for one day; fighting in the Fatuhada neighborhood near the U.S. Embassy on October 25 resulting in one death; and an attack in the Bebonuk neighborhood on October 27 in which two people were killed.

13. (U) In addition to the greater scale and lethality, these disturbances were accompanied by what appeared to be a concerted campaign to discredit Australian forces. Shortly following the death near the airport IDP camp on October 25, the claim that the victim had been shot by an Australian Defense Force officer began circulating especially among camp residents, despite strong evidence to the contrary. On Friday, following the killing of two men in Bebonuk, a story was immediately circulated that they had been arrested the previous evening by ADF and then their bodies dumped on the beach the following day. This story caused a near riot in the market area where the two men had worked as fish vendors. East Timor's daily newspapers quickly picked up on this version of the story, reporting in front page stories that ADF was suspected to be linked with the deaths.

Political actors behind the violence?

14. (C) The combination of the much greater scale of the disturbances with an apparent anti-Australian misinformation campaign has caused many observers to conclude that last week's violence was instigated for political ends, with the "Mozambique clique" (the group around former Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri which dominates the leadership of the ruling Fretilin party) identified as the prime culprit. International police have noted for months that many of the unemployed men they arrest for gang violence are well supplied with alcohol, cell phones, and cash. The Prosecutor General (who it should be said has his own agenda) has relayed to Emboffs that he has evidence pointing to Alkatiri family involvement in supplying the gangs. ADF sources have also said that much of the money trail can be traced to Alkatiri's brother, Ahmed. However, while suspicions are rife, proving such a connection is another matter. Moreover, at least some of the resource access can be explained by the extortion practices of many gang members or patronage at a more local level.

DILI 00000549 002.2 OF 002

15. (SBU) Whether or not the Mozambique clique/Fretilin leadership has been directly involved in instigation, it is clear that they are taking maximum rhetorical advantage of the situation to drive their own agenda of painting Alkatiri's resignation as resulting from "a well-planned conspiracy" involving Australia and of reducing the Australian military role here. On October 25, the day of the airport closure, Parliament passed a resolution calling for all international security personnel be put under one UN command. This demand was reiterated by Francisco "Lu'olo" Guterres, President of Parliament and a key Alkatiri ally, a few days later when receiving a European Union delegation. (Note: A press release from the office of the Prime Minister the next day reaffirmed support for the Australian and New Zealand troops as an independent force working "side-by-side" with the UN.) In recent days, Lu'olo has been relaying to international media that Parliament had received multiple complaints of maltreatment by Australian forces. According to a UN human rights advisor, none of these "complaints" seem to be going to any other relevant bodies such as the Provedor (Ombudsman) for Human Rights or the UN. She thinks it likely that some excessive force has been used but that it is a relatively minor issue.

Continued vulnerability

16. (U) Last week's events clearly demonstrate Dili's continued vulnerability to large-scale disturbances. Multiple overlapping phenomenon have combined to create an environment where political actors can instigate disturbances with relative ease. These phenomenon include: the continued presence of tens of thousands of IDPs, with several camps in particular developing as sources of instability; the entrenchment of the East-West

(Lorosae-Loromonu) issue as a still new but now very real social divide; the revival of many long-standing conflicts between communities, martial arts groups, and other groupings; and a pervasive sense of lack of law and order. Until these issues are addressed adequately, we can expect regular disturbances to continue. Like the incidents last week, the timing and location is likely to remain difficult if not impossible to predict. However, the pattern of incidents being relatively localized is expected to continue. For example, while last week's incidents impacted a large number of neighborhoods on the western side of Dili, many areas remained relatively untouched and the eastern side of the city saw virtually no problems.

17. (U) Comment: While the causes of instability in Dili are multifaceted, last week's developments again underscore the two primary challenges that must be addressed for any durable progress to be made. First, the ongoing crisis is essentially about a struggle among elite Timorese both for power and for competing political visions. Until there is a measure of political solution at the highest levels, this elite struggle will continue to be played out on the streets of Dili. At present, despite multiple efforts to promote dialogue, no substantive progress has been made on that front. Second, a culture of impunity for criminal acts pervades Dili and must end. Perpetrators can reasonably expect not to be arrested, and if they are, to be released within hours or days. While some criticism can be levied at the limited effectiveness of the international police, responsibility ultimately lies with the Timorese judicial system which continues to demonstrate that it is grossly insufficient to respond to the challenges. End comment.
GRAY